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Notes for remarks by Allan  
Gotlieb, Chairman of the  
Canada Council, to the House  
of Commons Standing Committee  
on Communications and Culture



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The Canada Council  
Conseil des Arts du Canada

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Chairman of the Canada Council,  
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Ottawa  
10 December 1991



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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee.

The Canada Council has been invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture as it examines the role of the arts and culture in Canadian society. The Council appreciates the seriousness of the task before the Committee at this moment in our country's history, and we are grateful for this opportunity to share our thoughts with you.

The Committee has stated that during these hearings it will concentrate on the implications of communications and culture on the development of a shared Canadian identity and a common pride in Canadian citizenship. Within that framework, the Committee seeks answers to four specific questions, and we shall try to respond to each.

**1. How do your activities presently contribute to the development of a shared Canadian identity and a state of pride in Canadian citizenship?**

When Prime Minister Louis Saint-Laurent, acting upon the recommendation of the Massey-Lévesque Commission, introduced in Parliament in 1957 the Act to establish the Canada Council, he remarked that governments should "support the cultural development of the nation but not control it." This principle was accepted by all the parties in Parliament, and the Council was established as a publicly financed but independent body, at arm's length from government. Authority for the Council's activities and its disbursement of funds was vested in a government-appointed board of 21 private citizens.

The Canadian Commission for Unesco was created at the same time, and the Council was given responsibility for providing its secretariat. The Commission's mandate is principally to act as liaison, advisor, source of information and to implement Unesco's programmes and activities in Canada. As one of Unesco's founding members in 1946, Canada undertook to establish the National Commission in accordance with Unesco's constitution.

For over three decades the Canada Council has been the federal government's "principal chosen instrument of support to the arts in Canada." The broad mandate given it by government to "foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts" has enabled it to create programmes that respond to virtually every level of artistic activity. The Council administers programmes to assist artists with their professional development, and in some areas of the performing arts, basic training; it supports artists and the creation of new work; and it assists the organizations that fulfil the essential function of linking the artists and the public by presenting, publishing, exhibiting or otherwise disseminating their work. Its Art Bank programme acquires and exhibits the work of Canada's visual artists in government offices and public spaces across the country.

Throughout, the Council has relied on the advice of Canadian artists in developing its programmes and policies, and the cornerstone of its operation is a system of peer review by which applications from artists are assessed by their peers to ensure that grant decisions are based above all on artistic merit.

The Council has always encouraged exchange and collaboration between English- and French-language artists and arts organizations. Artists from French and English Canada continually work together on the Council's juries and advisory committees to the mutual benefit of everyone concerned. English- and French-speaking readers and audiences have benefited

from the Council's translation programme, which makes books and plays by Canadian writers available in their language. The Council's programmes have benefited francophone artists outside Quebec, and connected them with those in Quebec.

Canada's artistic population currently works in an increasingly diverse cultural and racial environment, and the challenge before Council is to ensure that its programmes are properly responsive to the voices—old and new—that constitute our community of artists. National and international recognition for our artists grows every year. In recent weeks alone we have seen Rohinton Mistry, winner of the Canada Council's 1991 Governor General's Literary Award for his novel *Such a Long Journey*, named a finalist for Britain's prestigious Booker Prize. In Paris, *Joe*, a creation by Montreal choreographer Jean-Pierre Perreault, which is already recognized as a classic here, received overwhelming praise from critics and public. This was a co-production between Canada and France, with twelve Canadian dancers and eighteen French dancers performing together. Also in recent weeks, *Le Dortoir*, the stunning theatre-dance work of the Montreal troupe, Carbone 14, which has been winning rave reviews on tours in Canada, the United States and Europe, received another honour when the television adaptation, co-produced by Toronto's Rhombus Media and the National Arts Centre, won an International Emmy Award in New York.

The Canada Council has been involved with every one of these successes, whether it be through support to the artists, to the process of research and development, or to the organization which produced the work. Canadian film-makers and video artists who received their first support from the Council are winning Academy Awards, and recognition at important festivals in Canada and abroad in Cannes, Berlin and Atlanta. Canadian painters have established a distinctive presence in international exhibitions like the Venice Biennale. Theatre companies for children, such as la Marmaille and le Carrousel from Quebec, Green Thumb from British Columbia, and Mermaid Theatre from Nova Scotia, have established international reputations for innovation and excellence.

As Canadians we rejoice and take pride in every one of these successes. And through pride in the success of our talented fellow citizens in Canada and abroad we gain self-confidence in ourselves as a society. Accepting the the Air Canada Award for his outstanding contributions to film-making in Canada at the 1991 Genie Awards, film producer Robert Lantos summed up the importance of a unique Canadian artistic voice:

We can be successful. Not by trying to emulate others but by making movies that are really out of the norm, created by passion and not by committee. We win when we tell powerful stories with uncompromising commitment and a unique point of view. We have to complement our limited financial resources with unlimited creative genius. To succeed we must have self-esteem.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Lantos' film, *Black Robe*, which swept the Genie Awards, was based on Brian Moore's novel published by McClelland and Stewart, which received a block grant from the Canada Council, and the French translation, published by les Éditions du Roseau, was assisted by Council's Translation Programme. Two films which received Canada Council grants were also honoured by Genie Awards: *H* (Best Actress Award to Pascale Montpetit) and *Saeed* (Best Short Film).

The simple fact is that Canadian artists are taking on the world. They are, in the best sense of the word, competitive. In a global environment that is as tough and challenging as any we have ever known, our artists, from a relatively young society and small population base, are a match for their competitors anywhere. And the reason is because thirty years ago the Government had the wisdom and the vision to create a system whereby the best talent could be nurtured and encouraged. Today this long-term investment in Canadian creative talent is paying off and the whole country is richer as a result.

We take pride as a society in the achievements of our artists and look to them to give expression to our most deeply felt emotions. At the same time it is fundamental to our society to accept that artists and their work cannot be harnessed to political ends. The artist's voice demands freedom. It is the nature of artistic practice to challenge norms, and the best artists push against the boundaries of their discipline and try to move their art form in new directions. The results are sometimes unpredictable, controversial, or harshly critical of the social environment. Nevertheless, freedom of artistic expression is a cherished value in our society that must be preserved.

It is by fostering within our society a climate hospitable to creativity, innovation and intellectual inquiry that we will achieve our potential and make the contribution to the international order of which we are capable. Canadians must realize that we have matured as a nation, and while we lack a huge population, we are far from lacking in skills and ingenuity. In this age of globalization, the keys to survival are creativity, competitiveness and productivity, and we as Canadians have much to contribute to this global phenomenon.

**2. In what manner could your activities be changed and improved by you to increase that contribution?**

The Council's major concern in recent years has been adequate funding to enable it to fulfil its mandate. The Council's parliamentary appropriation for the current year for its ongoing programmes of support to artists and arts organizations is frozen, as it has been since 1986-87. In real terms, our funding has been shrinking for many years. The average real value of Council grants to arts organizations has declined by 30 per cent since 1978-79.

Canada's arts organizations have done all they can in terms of marketing and private sector fundraising. Private sector funds, which grew steadily throughout the eighties, have stalled, and organizations are not able to meet fundraising targets. Audiences for the performing arts grew by 35 per cent from 1980 to 1989. However, according to the Annual Council for Business and the Arts in Canada Survey of Performing Arts Organizations for 1990, the 1989-90 season saw an ominous drop in audiences of 7 per cent to 11.5 million. Ticket prices which now include GST have reached the maximum level of what the public can contribute. Many members of the public are also buying cheaper seats, and this has an impact on the organizations' revenue targets.

The impact on touring has been catastrophic. Most organizations have shelved or drastically cut back on touring plans, with the first victims being the public living in less populated areas. However, when the very existence of an organization is threatened, it is ill placed to assume the financial risks inherent in touring. The Council has always believed that the public across Canada should have access to the best work of its artists, and touring provides

the kinds of shared experience so necessary to the development of our consciousness as Canadians.

While the Council's budget for ongoing programmes has remained static, the arts community continues to evolve and diversify. Recognizing that it must at once preserve the best of what has been built over the years and respond to new developments within the arts community, the Council in 1989 embarked on a strategic planning exercise. In so doing, the Council was keenly aware that strategic planning in the current climate involves difficult, painful choices.

To enable it to better respond to an arts community that is growing in diversity as well as in numbers, the Council has undertaken a number of initiatives to facilitate access to Council programmes for Canadian artists of all cultural and racial backgrounds. This is an essential dimension of Canadian life that must be acknowledged in Council's programmes. In music and dance, initiatives are being developed to respond to the needs of artists practising non-Western art forms and traditions which the Council has yet to subsidize. Throughout this process, the Council has consulted artists from the communities concerned.

To ensure that it is responsive to artists in every province and territory of Canada, the Council is improving its outreach and communications efforts with a more community-based approach. It is also expanding the size of juries from three to four and five members wherever possible to ensure broader cultural and regional representation.

Along with its support to individual artists, assistance to arts organizations is at the heart of the Council's mandate. To assist arts organizations in various disciplines, the Council is developing models for multi-year funding.

**3. In what manner could government programmes, activities, policies and initiatives be modified or restructured to enhance your contribution?**

As a matter of general principle, it is essential to improve partnerships and coordinate efforts across government in matters relating to the arts and culture. Progress has been made in the last few years, and we hope this trend will continue. Government departments should also take into account in drafting legislation the impact on the cultural community of new laws and policies. Here again, there has been significant progress, but there is a need for enhanced cooperation and effective consultation mechanisms.

The Council enjoys good working relationships with its sister cultural agencies and with several departments, including Communications Canada, Employment and Immigration Canada, External Affairs and International Trade Canada, and Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada. Collaborative initiatives have been undertaken in several instances and other projects are under consideration.

One of the most crucial issues facing the cultural future of Canadian society which we hope the government will address is the building of the audiences of tomorrow. The arts have lost ground within the curricula of our schools. Arts organizations are fully aware of the need for audience development, and many have important outreach and school programmes. Touring is also a key factor in the process. However, their attention is currently focussed on survival, and the essential work of creating future audiences often takes second place. In order that the

extraordinary achievements of this generation are not lost, and to ensure that future generations have the same opportunities for creative development, it is essential that all levels of government address the critical questions relating to arts awareness and artistic literacy. At stake is not only the future of arts organizations, but the quality of life of our children and grandchildren and their ability to make creative and enlightened choices in all areas of their lives.

**4. What would be the impact of current federal government constitutional proposals on your contribution in these respects?**

The Canada Council strongly supports the government's proposal to maintain its responsibility for existing Canadian cultural institutions which include the Canada Council. Each of these institutions plays a key role in fostering and disseminating Canadian cultural expression in its various forms. Together, they form an essential partnership in enabling Canadians to share experiences and information, and develop our consciousness of our identity.

If the proposals are realized and the Canada Council is properly funded, the artistic development of the country will continue to evolve as is necessary in a mature society. It is significant that both the artistic community and members of the public have expressed strong support for the Canada Council and its role as a national funding body in the course of these discussions.

Consultation between the Council and provincial and municipal granting bodies occurs on several levels, and is increasing in importance as all funders recognize the need to share information and address issues of common concerns. In the current environment, important achievements in the arts are often founded upon partnerships between artists, governments (local, provincial and federal) and the private sector. The Council's Board meets with provincial and municipal officials during its annual out-of-town Council meeting, and Council staff have regular discussions with their counterparts over issues of common concern.

In the Constitutional Proposals the Government proposes that labour-market training be an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. In training in the arts, the Council plays an important role through its funding of two national schools (the National Ballet School and the National Theatre School) and other schools affiliated with performing arts organizations, as well as through grants to individual artists. The Council believes that a federal role in training is vital to the development of Canada's artists.

The Council has been a strong proponent of healthy provincial, municipal and private sector support for the arts. It remains so. But it is imperative to maintain a strong and healthy national funding body as well. The Council stated its reasons for this position a few months ago, and they are worth restating here.

First, such a body ensures equality of rights and opportunities across Canada.

Second, a diversity of funding sources helps the development of the arts and ensures greater diversity of creative expression. A clear benefit to artists is greater artistic freedom.

Third, a national body encourages higher levels of awareness, appreciation and judgment, since it draws on jurors and advisers from across the country, leading to balanced and well-informed decision making.

Finally, while each region and each group has its own rich heritage and cultural traditions, an aggregation of separate parts does not constitute a nation. The whole must be greater than the sum total of its parts.

In its proposals the government has talked about maintaining not simply the role of Canadian cultural institutions, but their national presence. The Canada Council is the instrument of its mandate, and to fulfil that mandate, must be in a position to respond to and support the best of artistic activity throughout the country, and foster the free exchange of ideas and talents among artists and their public.

In conclusion, it is through recognizing and investing in our talent wherever it occurs in this country, and enabling it to develop freely, that we will acquire a sense of pride in our identity and self-confidence as we face the challenges of the global environment.







